DOCUMENT RESUME

JC 710 187

ED 051 813

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TITLE	A Rationale for the Expansion of Religious Studies in Community Colleges.
PUB DATE	May 71
NOTE	27p.; Seminar paper
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Curriculum Development, Educational Innovation, Instructional Innovation, *Junior Colleges, *Religion, *Religious Education

ABSTRACT

With a new accepting opinion toward religious studies, already exemplified by courses and departments in secondary schools, universities, and state colleges, a need exists for the expansion of religious studies in the junior colleges. Teaching religion, especially the history and study of comparative religions, is considered legal as long as neutrality is guaranteed. Studies must neither advance nor inhibit certain religious beliefs. Religious studies can be academically presented in a cultural, social, historical, literary, and/or artistic sense. A scientific examination as well as a reflective, expansional treatment should be used. Options on form and structure include: (1) each professor treating religion as it arises naturally in his subject matter; (2) offering specific courses on religion in various departments; or (3) as the author advocates, creation of a separate department or program for religious studies. The history of religious studies in junior colleges is traced in this report. (CA)

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ED051813

A RATIONALE FOR THE EXPANSION OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

A Paper Presented to

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Submitted for Education 261D
Seminar in Junior College Curriculum

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May 29, 1971

JC 710 187

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES
AUG 18 1971
CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

A NEW CLIMATE OF OPINION

A new climate of opinion within the last twenty years has significantly changed attitudes toward the expansion of Religious Studies within tax-supported institutions of Higher Education. Milton McLean reports that in at least forty state universities it is now possible for a student to elect a minor or a major in religion which would not have been options prior to World War II.[1] Changes were gradual until the early part of the decade of the sixties. Student unrest was becoming visible and frustration and tension not unlike the pressure which antecedes an earthquake broke into view. This is not to say that the riots at Berkeley and elsewhere were directly responsible for the increased felt need for an extension of Religious Studies. Perhaps that claim would be premature. It is to say, however, that these revolts were symptomatic of a change which was already transpiring.

Students were now beginning to ask the serious questions about the basic meaning and quality of life. They became increasingly concerned about issues and decisions which affected their own lives. They began asking the ultimate questions in a disgust with institutions and the complacent patterns of the adult world, and in a profession of attachment to the essential ethical position of the historical religious traditions. Dealing with the emotions became as important as cognitive functions and human-oriented goals were sought. The new climate of opinion then has been receptive to increased Religious Studies.

THE POPULARITY OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AND THE STATE COLLEGES

The popularity of Religious Studies courses with students is revealed by Robert Michaelsen, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara:

> A religion 'core course' at the University of Iowa attracts nearly a thousand students each year. Similar enrollments have occurred in an introductory course in religion at Michigan State.[2]

Six branches of the University of California either presently have or anticipate departments or programs of Religious Studies. Santa Barbara has had a department since 1964; Riverside is developing a department. Berkeley announced a major in Religious Studies in the 1970 Fall Semester; UCLA is beginning to consider such possibilities.

California State Colleges are moving in this direction as well. Eleven of the nineteen State Colleges now have departments or programs in Religious Studies. The San Fernando Valley State College under the direction of Dr. Thomas Love in 1968 began a program of Religious Studies as an experiment. Now over fourteen hundred students are enrolled and the program has been elevated to a full department at the College. The California State College at Fullerton has also established a department under the leadership of Dr. Donald Gard. Chico State College will have a department soon as will the California State College at Long Beach under Dr. Gerald Strickler. California State College at Bakersfield has a Department of Philosophy and Religion.[3]

DEVELOPMENTS OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

ON THE SECONDARY LEVEL

The enthusiasm for Religious Studies in the universities and state colleges is beginning to be reflected in the high schools as well:

Pennsylvania. Forty schools offer 'Religious Literature of the West' in elective classes taught by English literature teachers. Materials are in the 3rd revision. A few schools will offer 'Religious Literature of the East.' The State Department of Public Instruction is mandated by the Legislature to develop curriculum materials; the materials are being developed by the University of Pennsylvania Faculty in Religious Studies.

Florida. Students in all high schools in St. Petersburg, as well as some other parts of the state have incorporated as supplementary to their Social Studies, materials on 'Religious Issues.' The materials are being developed by the Florida State University at the request of the State Board of Education.

Michigan. Religious Studies Departments at Michigan State University and Western Michigan University are developing a college curriculum in the accreditation of public school teachers in Religious Studies, the first such program in the U.S. .The State Board of Education is developing a curriculum in Religious Studies, not simply as an adjunct to English or Social Studies or History Departments.

Nebraska. Approximately 50% of the school districts in the state will use the curriculum being developed for kindergarten through the 12th grade by the University of Nebraska. Hawaii's state school system is considering Nebraska's model for adoption.

Indiana. Many schools are using the materials developed by Departments of Religious Studies and English at Indiana University.

Washington, D.C. The school board voted on September 16, 1970 to develop elective 'Comparative Religion' courses for senior students.

> California. Approximately 45 courses are being offered as elective courses to junior and senior secondary students within a radius of 50 miles from San Fernando Valley State College in Northridge. At present these courses are offered in Departments of English (e.g., 'Bible as Literature,' 'Comparative Religions') or History (e.g., 'Comparative Religions,' 'World Religions') or Social Studies (e.g., 'Comparative Religions,' 'Religion and Human Values'). Approximately 75 courses are projected in the same geographical area for the 1971 spring semester.[4]

In addition to offering two spring semester extension courses, one on Asian Religion and the other in cooperation with the Speech and Drama Department which is called "Modern Drama and the Human Predicament", San Fernando Valley State College makes available summer courses in both Summer Sessions and also a Summer Workshop for teachers and administrators in secondary schools. The following is a sample of the 1971 Summer Workshop provided by the Department of Religious Studies at Valley State for those responsible for teaching and administering religious studies in secondary education:

> Description: This workshop will deal with the following topics:
>
> Where religious studies fits into public school curriculum,
> The legality of teaching about religion in public schools,
> What can be presented within existing curricula,
> Libraries and other resources available in preparing a unit or course in religion.
>
> Participants will have opportunities to:
>
> Learn to make slides, tapes, or recordings for classroom use,
> Compare course outlines from various schools,
> Discuss with experts ways to approach the subject of religion,
> Accumulate bibliographical materials.[5]

The San Fernando Valley State College is currently acting as a clearing house for California high schools which either now offer or are interested in offering courses in religion.[6] State colleges or universities in the following states are sponsoring workshops for secondary teachers: California, Illinois, Indiana, Florida, Michigan, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Also approximately fifty English teachers at a preconvention program of the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention at Atlanta studied "The Bible in the English Program." The program is expected to be repeated at the next convention which is to be held in Las Vegas in the fall of 1971.[7]

THE NEED FOR THE EXPANSION OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

With developments such as these both on the secondary side of community colleges as well as the side of the four year colleges and universities, the need for expansion of Religious Studies on the community college level is obvious. Since a portion of community college students do transfer to state colleges and universities which already offer such majors or courses of study, it would be only fair to afford students in community colleges the opportunity to begin such study or to continue to build upon the courses which they were able to take in high school. Transfer students who were interested in Religious Studies would be at a decided disadvantage when compared to the permanent state college and university students who would have already completed the lower division courses in the first two years. It is clear, for instance, if community colleges were to establish departments or programs of Religious Studies that there would be no problem in transferring such courses since they are already being offered at the lower division level of state colleges and universities.

What about the vast number of community college students who do not transfer to the state college or university? The need is as great for terminal students as it is for college and university transfer students. We live in a pluralistic society with

not one common religion but many. This necessitates the teaching of (or about) religion in order to create a respect for religions of others and derive some knowledge of the similarities and differences as well. Anthony Nemeth, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Georgia, holds that the United States version of political democracy has no built-in sense of direction or capacity for setting cultural goals.

> Conversely, the process of goal setting or cultural direction must, therefore, emerge from the membership of the society or result from proposals of institutions other than government.[8]

The responsibility of the institution of higher education must go beyond training people in specialities though it should do that well. It must also provide the intellectual and emotional insight for wise goal selection and sagacious value formation. Old value systems are becoming disassembled with the formidable pressure of social change. The evidences of community disorganization and conflict are scenes which have become all too familiar to us.

What provision then, has the community college made in the area of Religious Studies? In an early survey of junior colleges in 1951, Dr. B. Lamar Johnson discovered the following colleges pioneering in this field with single courses: San Francisco City College,[9] Compton and Mount San Antonio Colleges,[10] San Bernardino Valley College,[11] and Stockton.[12] None of these courses, however, were specifically religious studies courses. They were integrated courses with family life and the humanities. In 1953 James W. Reynolds took a survey of the number of junior colleges in the

United States listing courses in religion in their educational programs. 51 of the 293 public junior colleges or only 17% offered courses in religion.[13] In 1954 a conference on Religion in the Junior Colleges was held at Southern Methodist University to explore ways in which religious studies could be included within the curriculum of the junior college.[14] Since that time many community colleges have developed courses in Religious Studies usually taught in the Departments of History and Philosophy. However, the courses are limited in number usually not more than two and therefore limited in the areas which can be covered. Since there is minimal development in Religious Studies, the instructors often have this as a secondary area of preparation and scholarship. Their primary focus is in their main specialty in which most of their teaching transpires.

Norman E. Tanis of the Henry Ford Community College delivered a position paper before his faculty senate in 1966. It was entitled "Religious Courses in the Curriculum of the Publicly Supported Junior College." Mr. Tanis recommended that courses in religion be initiated in the following areas: Judaeo-Christian thought and practice, primitive religion, the Eastern religions, a course on the role religion played in various societies and historical periods, and a contemporary treatment of observation and evaluation of the role religion plays in the institutions and practices of modern men.[15]

Roger Schmidt submitted a "Proposal for the Creation of A Religious Studies Department at San Bernardino Valley College." This proposal was received by the UCLA Clearinghouse for Junior

College Information on April 23, 1970. Mr. Schmidt indicated that if accepted, Valley College would become the first California Community College to have such a department. Apparently the proposal was made subsequent to the popularity of a World Religions course. The recommendation was that the Religious Studies Department would offer four courses initially. Two would be new courses: "Introduction to Religious Studies"and"Religion in America." "World Religions", a third course would be transferred to the Religious Studies Department from the Philosophy Department. "Literature and Religion of the Bible" would be a revised course which had been taught in the evening division previously. Mr. Schmidt suggested the possibility of team teaching to provide more opportunity for ecumenicity and pluralism in staffing.[16]

THE NEW LEGAL CLIMATE

The modest recommendations which were proposed in the previous chapter are only the beginning of relevant course offerings which could be increased to include extended day and adult education. Yet perhaps the question of legality, strangely enough, may linger in the minds of some community college personnel. Neither the Constitution of the United States nor the Constitution of the State of California prohibits the teaching of religion in the public schools and recent court rulings involving religion affirm that the teaching of the history of religions and the study of comparative religions is legal.

The pertinent Constitutional Amendment when considering the teaching of religion in institutions of higher education is the First Amendment which has guaranteed that no law would be enacted which would either advance or inhibit religion. A significant clarification of this amendment transpired in 1963, in the Supreme Court case of the Abington School District vs. Schempp, which outlawed devotional Bible reading in public schools. The regulations maintaining such exercises even with provisions for the excusing of objectors was considered to be the showing of special favor to Judaeo- Christian tradition. As such, it was held to be a violation of the neutrality guaranteed in the First Amendment.[17]

Mr. Justice Clark rejected the argument that the Court's action itself tended to establish a religion of secularism and therefore was in violation of the guaranteed neutrality. He responded as follows:

> We do not agree, however, that this decision in any sense has that effect. In addition, it might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.[18]

Mr. Justice Brennan affirmed this position of constructive neutrality and went on to add that the Court does not prohibit teaching about the Bible or the differences between religions in classes of literature or history. He indicated that it would be impossible to teach meaningfully many subjects in the social sciences or the humanities without the inclusion of religion.[19]

Constructive neutrality indicates that the government is not anti-religion. Never in the history of our country has there been a complete refusal to provide for the basic religious needs of people uniformily in the armed services, in government hospitals and penal institutions to say nothing of the tax exempt status of property used for religious, educational, and other non-profit purposes. Provision is made where appropriate to neutralize the otherwise restrictive effects of governmental policy in connection with religion. The purpose is not to promote religion but to promote religious liberty.

The Constitution of California reaffirms the Federal free exercise and no-establishment clauses. The study of religion or theology in California institutions of higher education is legal and acceptable.[20] Departments of Religious Studies are clearly legal in the state of California as is evidenced by the existence of such departments in many of the branches of the University of California and in most of the state colleges as has been indicated earlier. In the article, "Religion, Theology, and Public Higher Education", published in the California Law Review, the authors summarize the legal and educational guidelines in the area of religion in Higher Education:

> To offer theological or other courses in religion which are voluntary, conducted on a high level, intellectually objective, given to students at college age in absence of circumstances which would render such courses coercive on the religious beliefs of students or indicate an 'official' approval or disapproval of a particular viewpoint is constitutionally and legally unobjectionable.[21]

Such legislation and opinions have opened the door to the establishment of department or programs of Religious Studies.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

Berelson and Steiner in their scientific exploration of human behavior have discovered that religion has been a vital part of all known human societies. They state: "Precisely because its values are invested with sacred sanction, religion is a powerful force in any society."[22] The field of Religious Studies is an important one for any college which claims to provide for the advancement of understanding of man and the world in which he lives. It is one in which scholarly critical investigation and teaching can be, indeed are, pursued. We are considerably past the period in history when the academic world need be especially concerned that piety might pass for knowledge or that some special plan to propagandize for a given religion might succeed.

These questions of possible religious indoctrination and scholarly treatment were raised and explored by the evaluating committee at the San Fernando Valley State College at Northridge, California, prior to recommending full departmental status for the program of Religious Studies this year. The results of their investigation are as follows:

> The scholarly approach to the study of religion demonstrated by the faculty, the breadth of content represented by the course offerings, course outlines, and bibliographies, and pains taken by the director and his faculty to avoid evangelizing or propagandizing religious belief, all attested to the critical thinking about religion that is fostered. Simply because religion, particularly in Western culture, has tended to be evangelistic or that early

> American colleges did promote sectarian religious beliefs, does not warrant the conclusion that a collegiate curriculum in Religious Studies will be other than scholarly or academically rigorous. It would appear that the question of indoctrination is left over from another time and place.[23]

As is well recognized, two of the major functions of any college are the advancement and communication of knowledge. In a program in Religious Studies the pursuit of these goals would be consistent with various broad areas of academic endeavor. To be included here are the history of religions, the history of religious ideas, comparative religion, and contemporary movements and issues in religions. In a variety of ways these areas include such topics as the relations of religion and society, religion and the arts, religion and the sciences, and religion and the individual. Naturally it is implicit in this treatment that teaching and research in such a program would involve the consideration of particular religious traditions. There is no reason to believe that the teaching by the professors of Religious Studies would be any less objective than the teaching of professors in any other academic fields which deal with man and his ideas and ideals.

That religion can be studied as phenomena of culture (like all other cultural phenomena) is supported by Clyde A. Holbrook in his book Religion, A Humanistic Field. Here he describes the close interrelationship between the study of religion and the study of other academic disciplines.[24] Bernard Eugene Meland, in Higher Education and the Human Spirit, holds that religious awareness and knowledge are integral to the entire educational

process.[25] The study of religion, then, has a valid and intellectually defensible place within the college curriculum.

Colleges as they plan to implement programs or departments of Religious Studies should seek qualified instructors and provide a faculty which is representative of the religious pluralism of our society. This being accomplished colleges have every right to expect that the courses will be taught with the same intellectual expertise, analysis, and objectivity as exist in other fields of study.

THE DECISION ON METHODOLOGY

If Religious Studies is to be an academic discipline within the college curriculum, the next question which naturally arises is that of methodology. It is here that deeper understanding of the nature of the subject is necessary to accept the need for different methodology. As J. Milton Yinger states in his recent book The Scientific Study of Religion:

> For generations, many social scientists have ... assumed that everything of importance about religion could ultimately be learned by objective study. In the contemporary scene, however, easy assumptions about the problems associated with the objective study of religion are gradually being dispelled. Social scientists no longer assert that everything important about religion is available to the objective observer. That is, after all, an extra-scientific assumption, which is not itself demonstrable by scientific study.[26]

Yinger continues by indicating that just as it is impossible to claim that the analysis of paint, painter, and patron exhausts the meaning of art;likewise,it is impossible to make equivalent claims for the analysis of religion. Ultimately he feels that the scientific study of religion will gain by the acceptance of a more modest role.[27]

This is not to say that the objective study of religion should be discontinued. Nor should the scientist modify the thoroughness of his examination. It is to say, that the scientific method of investigation alone is insufficient for an adequare understanding of the subject in its variety and totality. Scientists can make certain types of determinations as objective observers with the available data which they collect. Yet there is another

kind of contribution which is offered by the practitioner from the inside of the religious experience which is of value in the development of a theory of religion.

Richard E. Wentz, Director of the Office of Religious Affairs and Professor of Religious Studies at Penn State University, writing in the Journal of Higher Education recommends that a new type of methodology be formed for religious study. He feels that religious study should be a critical and appreciative experience of the appositional character of life. By appositional he means the placing of one character beside another for observation, understanding, and insight. In addition to scientific examination of the religions of man, the method which he suggests would have a reflective function. It is through this channel that the kinds of questions and the quality of awareness would bring meaning to human relationships.[28]

This approach would treat the whole nature of man in the broad complexity of his interrelationships with others and with his environment. There would also be a dynamic or expansional quality of the methodology which would recognize man's broadening knowledge and emotional complexion. In addition there would be an awareness of relational forces of meaning and value which in turn would imply that the phenomenology of religion would be in movement. Human sensibilities of meaning and value would expand to be relevant to new needs so that the orientation of the methodology would be turned to the future as well as to the past. Richard Wentz holds that since service is fundamental expecially to Western religion, a design for field models could be formed and

would be expecially meaningful in publicly supported institutions of Higher Education. He feels that religious study must also express aesthetic, celebrating, and communicating sides in an age in which institutions of religion sometines stultify them.

There is no one methodology which is singularly adequate for utilization in Religious Studies. It is hoped that analysis, criticism, reflection, imagination, creativity, etc., all would be used when appropriate. We should show caution, however, when the attempt is made to permit a single methodology to the exclusion of all others.

OPTIONS ON FORM AND STRUCTURE

There are a variety of ways in which Religious Studies have been included in the college curriculum. There is the integrative form in which each professor treats religion as it arises naturally in his subject matter. Theoretically this form seems logical but according to a number of colleges and universities which have attempted it, it does not in reality prove feasible. Robert S. Michaelsen, consultant at the Conference on Religion in the Junior College, would agree that the integrated or pervasive approach is highly desirable but not adequate.[29]

What problems are involved with this approach? Preparation of instructors is a major concern. Most graduate study today is highly specialized and a teacher whose major is American History is not likely to have anything more than superficial knowledge of religion in America unless he specialized in a religious figure, movement, or denomination. Another problem is that of orientation. According to Robert Michaelsen:

> A literary approach to the Bible, for example, is fine in its place, but it hardly does justice to the Bible -- to the purpose of those who wrote the Bible, to those in the Judaeo-Christian tradition who have turned and continue to turn to the Bible as a source of inspiration and authority, and to the major influence which the Bible has had in our Western world. Again one can approach the Puritans historically or from a literary standpoint or in terms of their political philosophy, but in each case he would be merely pecking around the edge of Puritanism while failing to get at the heart

of that great religious movement which has conditioned so much of our approach to life and its values.
A more positive way of putting this is to point out that religion is a content area in itself, worthy not only of being considered on the fringes of various other areas but also as a central part of the curriculum. Religion is fundamental in human experience and culture -- as fundamental as most if not all of the other areas which are studied in courses in the normal liberal arts curriculum. To leave it out of the curriculum, or to deal with it only incidentally in other 'subject areas' is to bypass a large area of that experience and culture which is the central concern of our educational system. I would go, even further, and say that such an approach will almost inevitably be out of focus. Religion has been and is frequently the center of orientation in that experience and culture, the fundamental principle around which culture gravitates. To study culture without giving a central place to religion is like studying biology without examining man.[30]

If a community college does create a department or a program of Religious Studies, there are a number of helpful curricular suggestions available. Robert Michaelsen recommends a course entitled "Religion in Human Culture" to be taught as a part of the core curriculum in the Junior College.[31] Milton McLean presents the curriculum roster of Religious Studies for 135 public colleges and universities and 11 private colleges for the 1965-66 academic year. He gives full-time student enrollment, type of institution, description of actual departmental or program course offerings, and the treatment accorded the study of religion.[32] Thomas Love in a paper delivered to the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion gives the 1970-71 Catalogue list of courses offered in the Department of Religious Studies at the San Fernando Valley State College as well as factors involved in

the selection of new full-time faculty.[33] Norman Tanis has recommended courses specifically for the curriculum of publicly supported junior colleges.[34] Roger Schmidt in his "Proposal for the Creation of a Religious Studies Department at San Bernardino Valley College" makes suggestions concerning specific courses using some already operating and creating new ones as well.[35] In addition the California Junior Colleges Association has published two constructive works on the subject: "Guidebooks for California Junior Colleges on Courses Pertaining to Religion" and "Religion and Western Values", in which a number of course outlines are included.[36]

CONCLUSION

The concerns of college students today are increasingly theological and moral. They are expressing themselves in surprisingly religious terms with accelerated interest in study and dialogue revolving around the meaning of life. As we have witnessed, not only are Religious Studies popular with college students but with high school students as well. The need for the expansion of Religious Studies in the Community Colleges is great and with the new climate of opinion generally and the change in the legal atmosphere specifically there is no insurmountable obstacle in the path of such development. Religious Studies is highly qualified as an academic discipline which is affirmed by scholars and educational institutions alike.

The methodology in Religious Studies must go beyond the utilization of the scientific method since the material with which it deals is not always revealed by objective study. Reflection and dynamic expansion in methodology are necessary in order to recognize man's broadening knowledge and emotional complexion, the meaning of life, and relevance of values. The aesthetic, celebrating, and communicating functions might be included as well as criticism, analysis, and synthesis. No one methodology can discover adequately the variety and totality of the subject.

While Religious Studies may have many forms in the curriculum of the Community College, it is the opinion of this writer as a

result of his research in the area that a department or a program of Religious Studies would be most effective in the presentation of the subject. Interdepartmental course offerings could include instructors from Religious Studies in order that the unity of knowledge may be presented in its wholeness. If as educators we are to do justice to our obligation to expose students to the central elements of culture, we should consider carefully the expansion of Religious Studies in Community Colleges.

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